United Nations A/C.5/71/SR.27

General Assembly
Seventy-first session

Official Records

Distr.: General
2 June 2017

Original: English

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 27th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 10 March 2017, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. King ..... (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines)
Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Ruiz Massieu

Contents

Agenda item 134: Programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017 (*continued*)

Standards of accommodation for air travel

Estimates in respect of special political missions, good offices and other political initiatives authorized by the General Assembly and/or the Security Council (*continued*)

Thematic cluster II: sanctions monitoring teams, groups and panels (*continued*)

Panel of Experts on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/71/L.58: Modalities for the intergovernmental negotiations of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be sent as soon as possible, under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, to the Chief of the Documents Management Section (dms@un.org), and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org/).

17-03955 (E)

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 134: Programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017 (*continued*)

Standards of accommodation for air travel
(A/71/741, A/71/741/Corr.1 and A/71/822)

1. **Mr. Cutts** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on standards of accommodation for air travel (A/71/741 and A/71/741/Corr.1), said that the report provided information on those standards for the two-year period ended 30 June 2016 and comparative statistics for the two-year period ended 30 June 2014, as well as analyses of trends during the period from 2006 to 2016.

2. By its resolution 67/254 A, the General Assembly had decided that, subject to certain provisos, the standard of accommodation for air travel for official travellers below the level of Assistant Secretary-General would be business class if a single-leg journey was nine hours or more, and would also be business class for a multi-leg journey if the combined travel time was 11 hours or more. The Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to modify his administrative instructions on standards of accommodation for air travel so that the duration of a journey was determined on the basis of the most economical route available, provided that the total additional time of the whole journey did not exceed the most direct route by four hours. The Assembly had also endorsed recommendations to establish economy class as the standard of accommodation for air travel for consultants and individual contractors, unless determined otherwise by the Secretary-General on the basis of considerations relating to the circumstances of the traveller and the interests of the Organization.

3. The Under-Secretary-General for Management had subsequently promulgated new administrative instructions on official travel (ST/AI/2013/3) and on participants in advisory meetings (ST/AI/2013/5), which included changes in the travel entitlements of non-United Nations officials travelling on behalf of the Organization, with the exception of those explicitly excluded from the new policies, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 67/254 A.

4. In its resolution 69/274 A, the General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to take immediate action to limit the use of exceptions to the standards of accommodation, and to analyse the trends in exceptions and report thereon to the General Assembly. During the period from July 2014 to June 2016, the largest increase in requests for exceptions had been in the category of prominent persons, which had resulted from a stricter interpretation than required on the part of the Administration of the standards mandated in resolution 67/254 A. Detailed analyses and explanations of the trends in the number of exceptions granted and the related additional costs were provided in sections II, III and IV of the Secretary-General's report (A/71/741). In its resolution 67/254 A, the Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to review the use of exceptions for the category of prominent persons and to report thereon to the General Assembly. As additional time was required to review the matter, the Secretary-General was requesting to submit his related proposals at the first part of the Assembly's resumed seventy-third session.

5. In its resolution 69/274 A, the General Assembly had further requested the Secretary-General to provide information on any new trends for making use of frequent flyer miles to improve the administration of travel; detailed updates on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the comprehensive audit of air travel activities and related practices (A/67/695); comprehensive information on air travel activities; consolidated data on the gains achieved through the implementation of section VI of General Assembly resolution 67/254 A; comprehensive information on the effects of the implementation of Umoja on travel administration, including updated information, trends and analysis in all areas relating to air travel in the United Nations; and an assessment of the United Nations standards of accommodation with regard to class of air travel. Those matters were addressed in sections V to X of the Secretary-General's report (A/71/741).

6. The General Assembly had also endorsed the recommendation contained in the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/69/787) to request the Secretary-General to conduct further analysis on the lump-sum travel provision and to provide an updated proposal in that regard. As additional time was required to review the matter, the Secretary-General proposed maintaining the provision at 70 per cent of the least restrictive economy class fare until the first part of the resumed seventy-third session of the General Assembly, when a final proposal would be submitted.

7. **Mr. Ruiz Massieu** (Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/71/822), said that resources for official travel should be utilized judiciously in the interest of the Organization.

8. Considering the developments in the air travel industry since the 1970s, notably that business class was now functionally equivalent to yesterday's first class, the Advisory Committee recommended that the General Assembly should review the Organization's policy on entitlements to first class travel. Moreover, in the light of the frequent official travel undertaken by senior personnel on behalf of the Organization, the Advisory Committee recommended that the General Assembly should request the Secretary-General to implement a frequent flyer mile programme with respect to official travel undertaken by personnel at the level of Assistant Secretary-General and above, beginning no later than January 2018.

9. He noted that the Secretary-General's report (A/71/741) did not include any proposals relating to the lump-sum travel provision. In the light of the cost reductions arising from the use of the provision, the Advisory Committee recommended that the General Assembly should request the Secretary-General to take the steps necessary to implement a pilot scheme from January to December 2018, under which all staff would be required to use the lump-sum option for home leave, family visit or education grant travel.

10. **Mr. Viera** (Ecuador), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Group attached great importance to the effective and efficient utilization of resources for air travel and welcomed the efforts made by the Secretary-General to improve the information provided to Member States in that regard.

11. The Group concurred with the Advisory Committee's recommendation regarding the need to review the Organization's policy on entitlements to first class travel. It recommended against the establishment of a corporate frequent flyer mile programme in the light of the Secretary-General's finding that the costs of managing such a programme more than outweighed any associated benefits and that implementing such a programme at the United Nations would require the deployment of significant additional resources.

12. The Group noted with concern that the report of the Secretary-General (A/71/741) appeared to attribute the spike in authorized exceptions to the changes in the standards of accommodation for air travel endorsed by the General Assembly. In particular, the Group would seek specific information on why members of organs and subsidiary organs, committees, councils and commissions of the United Nations were being treated as exceptions, when the standards pertaining to those persons were indicated in paragraph 20 of General Assembly resolution 67/254 A. It also noted with concern the low rate of compliance with the directive on advance purchase of tickets for air travel and concurred with the Advisory Committee on the need for enhanced efforts by the Secretariat in that regard. Lastly, he reiterated that any policy changes and new formulations in the area of standards of accommodation for air travel, like other management and financial issues, remained the exclusive prerogative of the Fifth Committee and the General Assembly.

13. **Ms. Grant** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Armenia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the States members of the European Union supported the Secretary-General in his efforts to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations. She nevertheless noted with concern the increase in overall air travel costs year after year, and underscored the need for the Organization to employ the same strict discipline that Member States applied to themselves.

14. The General Assembly should further refine its policy guidance to the Secretariat on air travel. The significant increase in the number and cost of exceptions approved by the Secretariat remained a concern, notwithstanding the progress made by the Assembly in that regard at its sixty-seventh and sixty-ninth sessions. The standards of accommodation for air travel should also be updated on an ongoing basis in line with developments in the travel practices of national administrations. In addition, managerial accountability must be strengthened to ensure that funds were used judiciously. In that connection, incentives must be developed to address the persistent low levels of compliance with the advance purchase policy directive and recurring over expenditure in travel budgets.

15. In the interest of comprehensively addressing the issue of air travel costs, including daily subsistence allowances, and promoting fairness within the United Nations system, the European Union invited the Secretary-General to undertake a thorough review of the policy on air travel, including for members of organs and subsidiary organs, committees, councils and commissions. Thanks to Umoja, the Secretariat would now be able to provide the Assembly with long-awaited comprehensive information on air travel activities.

16. Her delegation looked forward to discussing how a more centralized travel processing system might increase the visibility and efficiency of travel processing functions and reduce fragmentation in that regard. The Secretary-General should make every effort to develop innovative working practices aimed at ensuring the efficient and effective management of resources.

17. In line with its commitment to protecting the environment, particularly following the adoption of the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the European Union fully supported all steps taken by the Secretariat to reduce reliance on air travel, particularly by promoting the use of technological solutions such as videoconferencing.

18. **Ms. Connelly** (United States of America) said that the Organization's air travel policies must be reformed in view of their impact on mandate fulfilment and significant financial implications. The data provided in the Secretary-General's report (A/71/741) would contribute to enhancing transparency and ensuring that Member States made informed decisions in identifying opportunities for efficiencies.

19. Efforts should be made to contain travel-related costs by ensuring that travel resources were used only when necessary for carrying out mandated activities; by conducting virtual meetings when possible; and by limiting the number of exceptions to the standards of accommodation.

20. As business class was now functionally equivalent to the first class of the past, business class travel should be used only when warranted and the travel time requirements for its use should be re-evaluated. Economy class should be the standard for air travel for the United Nations, in line with the practice of many Member States. The Organization must follow the example of many States, including her own, in adjusting its travel policies to reflect contemporary travel alternatives and budgetary realities, with a view to effectively targeting its resources towards fulfilling its mandates.

Estimates in respect of special political missions, good offices and other political initiatives authorized by the General Assembly and/or the Security Council (continued)

Thematic cluster II: sanctions monitoring teams, groups and panels (continued)

Panel of Experts on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea
(A/71/365/Add.9 and A/71/595/Add.9)

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/71/L.58: Modalities for the intergovernmental negotiations of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration
(A/71/827; A/C.5/71/19)

21. **Ms. Bartsiotas** (Controller), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the proposed additional resource requirements for 2017 for the Panel of Experts on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (A/71/365/Add.9), said that Security Council resolution 2321 (2016) mandated the Panel of Experts, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006), and the Secretariat to increase their monitoring and reporting activities and to carry out additional tasks as outlined in paragraphs 10 to 21 of the Secretary-General's report. To perform those activities, resources in the amount of $697,400 were required for 2017 to cover the costs of five additional positions proposed for establishment in New York, as well as costs related to travel and information and communications technology. Pending approval of those resources by the General Assembly, the requirements for the period from 1 January to 31 March 2017 were being funded through the commitment authority of the Secretary-General under the provisions of General Assembly resolution 70/250 on unforeseen and extraordinary expenses.

22. Introducing the Secretary-General's statement of programme budget implications of draft resolution A/71/L.58: Modalities for the intergovernmental negotiations of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration (A/C.5/71/19), she said that additional resources in the amount of $1.2 million were requested for 2017 for the preparation of an intergovernmental conference to adopt a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. Under the terms of the draft resolution, the General Assembly would decide to authorize the organization of the intergovernmental conference; request the Secretary-General to appoint a Secretary-General of the conference to act as a focal point on behalf of the United Nations system; request the Secretary-General to prepare a note on the organization of work of the conference that would serve as the basis for its precise modalities, to be decided by Member States by January 2018; and request the President of the General Assembly, with the support of the Secretary-General and drawing on the expertise of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other related entities, to organize a series of informal thematic

sessions between April and November 2017 on facilitating safe, orderly and regular migration. The Assembly would also request regional economic commissions to organize discussions among Member States and other stakeholders to examine regional and subregional aspects of international migration, and would request the Secretary-General to present a report on the full range of inputs to the preparatory process and provide Member States with recommendations before the beginning of negotiations in 2018. The proposed activities would be carried out by a broad range of departments and offices, as reflected in table 12 of the statement of programme budget implications.

23. **Mr. Ruiz Massieu** (Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the report of the Advisory Committee on the proposed additional resource requirements for 2017 for the Panel of Experts on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (A/71/595/Add.9), said that, while the Advisory Committee acknowledged that the expanded mandate emanating from Security Council resolution 2321 (2016) and the resulting revised planning assumptions would likely lead to an increased workload, it was not convinced that the extent of the additional tasks required could be reliably foreseen at present. The Advisory Committee was of the view that the creation of two separate posts in the Professional category was not justified and therefore recommended against the proposed establishment of the post of Political Affairs Officer. In addition, as no adequate justification had been presented for increasing meeting services support, it recommended against the proposed establishment of the post of Meetings Assistant. The Advisory Committee also recommended a small adjustment to the proposed requirements for travel. It recommended approval of the other resources requested by the Secretary-General.

24. Introducing the report of the Advisory Committee on the programme budget implications of draft resolution A/71/L.58 (A/71/827), he said that the Advisory Committee recommended reductions in the proposed requirements for consultancy and travel of staff and experts. It also recommended against approval of the requested resources for conference facilities and the establishment of an additional staff position in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. It furthermore noted the need for greater clarity with regard to the role of IOM. Lastly, the Advisory Committee recommended that the Fifth Committee should inform the General Assembly that, should the Assembly adopt the draft resolution, an additional appropriation would be required to cover resource requirements under the sections of the programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017 indicated in paragraph 21 of the Advisory Committee's report.

25. **Mr. Bermeo** (Ecuador), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Group was in favour of approving the resources requested for the implementation of draft resolution A/71/L.58. It recalled the mandates approved under General Assembly resolution 71/1, whereby the Assembly had committed to launching a process of intergovernmental negotiations for the adoption of a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration at an intergovernmental conference to be held in 2018.

26. **Mr. Abdallah** (Chad), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that the Group attached high importance to the issue of migration, particularly given the current unprecedented levels of human mobility worldwide, as underscored in General Assembly resolution 71/1. The response of the international community must therefore be commensurate with the magnitude of the challenges faced in that regard. In the context of the negotiations on resolution 71/1, the Group had strongly defended the proposal to hold an intergovernmental conference in 2018 to adopt a global compact on safe, orderly and regular migration, and had played a key role in guaranteeing the inclusion, in the final document, of provisions aimed at ensuring the equal treatment of migrants and refugees. As the first major United Nations conference on migration, the intergovernmental conference would represent a major milestone. The resulting global compact would similarly constitute the first United Nations document addressing all aspects of international migration.

27. The Group recognized that the potential cost implications of requirements for meetings and documentation relating to the conference could not be estimated until the modalities of the conference had been determined. It also noted that, according to the related statement of programme budget implications (A/C.5/71/19) submitted in accordance with rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the adoption of the draft resolution would entail additional resource requirements in the amount of $1,244,700 for 2017, which would represent a charge against the contingency fund for the biennium 2016-2017. The Group called for the preparatory process and organization of the conference to be funded through the regular budget, and for the costs of the travel and participation of representatives from developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, to be covered by the voluntary trust fund for the

conference proposed under draft resolution A/71/L.58. Lastly, he welcomed the appointment of the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Migration and hoped that the Committee would support her in fulfilling her mandate to provide effective guidance for addressing large movements of refugees and migrants.

28. **Mr. De Preter** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, the Republic of Moldova, said that the States members of the European Union had contributed actively to the consensus on draft resolution A/71/L.58 and welcomed the detailed and precise information set out in the document.

29. Given the importance that the Organization attached to the issue of safe, orderly and regular migration, the European Union was surprised that, according to the Secretary-General's statement of programme budget implications, there was no potential for absorbing costs or reprioritizing resources within the existing programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017, as provided for under the budget procedure established in General Assembly resolutions 41/213 and 42/211. His delegation would continue to question the incremental nature of the budget. In particular, as travel of staff and experts and conference management represented significant categories of expenditure, economical and efficient solutions must be found, given the scarcity of available resources.

30. Under paragraph 11 of the draft resolution, the United Nations Secretariat and IOM would jointly service the negotiations and the preparatory process for the adoption of the global compact, the former providing capacity and support and the latter supplying the necessary technical and policy expertise. The European Union was therefore surprised that several Secretariat entities, including regional economic commissions and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, had explicitly requested the assistance of consultants to prepare for the different phases of the preparatory process set out in the draft resolution. While his delegation did not question the direct involvement of those entities in the preparation of the global compact, it wondered why they could not rely on in-house capacity to provide the assistance required.

31. **Mr. Chheena** (Pakistan) said that the high-level plenary meeting on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants had been a watershed moment marked by the unanimous adoption of General Assembly resolution 71/1, which reaffirmed the international community's commitment to saving lives, protecting rights and sharing responsibility for facilitating safe, orderly and regular migration. The global compact would be an important step towards translating that commitment into tangible action, in the light of the growing global phenomenon of large-scale movements of people across borders and regions. He welcomed the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Migration, whose leadership and dynamism would be essential for striking delicate balances among interests and perspectives throughout the negotiation process.

32. As the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration, IOM worked closely with a broad range of partners to ensure the orderly and humane management of migration; promote international cooperation on migration issues; assist in the search for practical solutions to migration problems; and provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees. IOM therefore had a central role to play in the development of the global compact, and further details were required on the specific role of IOM in jointly servicing the negotiations on the global compact, the nature of its contributions in the area of technical and policy expertise and the staff resources that it would provide.

33. Regional economic commissions had an important role to play in organizing discussions among Member States and other stakeholders on regional and subregional aspects of international migration and in providing inputs to the preparatory process for the global compact. The agreed modalities for the development of the global compact provided a valuable substantive basis for Member State-led consultations leading up to the intergovernmental negotiations in 2018. In particular, the six themes proposed in draft resolution A/71/L.58 for the informal sessions to be held between April and November 2017 covered a wide spectrum of issues for consideration. His delegation thanked the Government of Mexico for offering to host a meeting in November 2017 to review the inputs received. In conclusion, Pakistan concurred with the request for additional resources contained in the Secretary-General's statement of programme budget implications (A/C.5/71/19).

34. **Ms. Connelly** (United States of America) said that statements of programme budget implications must reflect the intent and spirit of the draft resolutions to which they related. The resources proposed for consultants and travel of staff and experts for the implementation of draft resolution A/71/L.58 were excessive. Such excesses reflected poorly on the

United Nations and its Member States by lending credence to criticisms that the Organization was overly focused on conducting meetings at the expense of fulfilling its mandates. Although the Advisory Committee had begun responsibly trimming some of the proposed resources contained in the Secretary-General's statement of programme budget implications, additional streamlining was necessary. Her delegation looked forward to the adoption of the draft resolution.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.